

Isabel

By Paula Puddephatt

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So many people didn't realise this, but Jim and Debra had actually had three daughters, once upon a time. Katie mentioned this to her friends and workmates in the Red Lion, where the staff were busy preparing for the eldest daughter's engagement party.

"No, you must have that wrong," said Tracey. "Jim and Debs have been coming in here for years. They have two girls, Claire and Maria. Claire's the one who's getting engaged. Georgina, we're about ready for that banner now!"

"There was a middle daughter," insisted Katie. "A year younger than Claire, and two years older than Maria. Isabel. She was in my sister's school year."

Tracey frowned. "You sure? Only I can't believe Debs wouldn't have said."

"How long have you lived in this town, Trace?"

"Best part of ten years. Rupert was six months, when we arrived."

"A long time, but not that long," said Katie. "Like I said, Isabel was in Yvette's year at school. She disappeared."

June 1993.

Isabel arrived at the King's Head just after six. Her local, now that she was living with her boyfriend, Mike.

Isabel had moved into the bedsit with Mike three months ago, the week before her eighteenth. He was eleven years older, which her parents thought was "too old". But then, there had to be something, didn't there?

Something to disapprove of. When it came to Isabel and that family, being disapproved of was basically what Jim and Debra's middle daughter was there for.

The King's Head was a dive, of course. Still, the extremely loud heavy metal music, generally blaring from the jukebox, was very much Isabel's kind of music. And she loved the posters of various metal bands, that covered most of the wall space, and an appreciable percentage of the ceiling.

In truth, all wasn't entirely well in Isabel's relationship, hence her increasing tendency to "quickly pop in" to the pub, after work.

"Hey, Isabel - how's it going?"

Isabel smiled, as she looked up to see Danny, who rented another room in the house where she and Mike lived. Lived? Okay, existed.

Isabel hadn't liked Danny at first. Had considered him to be just another of Mike's dodgy mates. Which view had some validity, in truth. And, yet...

A couple of regulars in the King's Head had heard Danny suggesting that he and Isabel "go for a drive". They had left the pub together at around 9pm.

The remains of a young woman were discovered nine months later, in a remote spot over fifty miles away. No one was ever charged for her murder.

And the family moved on with terrifying ease, hardly even mentioning her name.

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